THE CROSS-CUT

MR. BARNHAM

SYNOPSIS.—At Thornton Fairchild's death his son Robert learns there has been a dark period in his father's life which for almost thirty years has caused him suffering. The secret is hinted at in a document left by the elder Fairchild, which also informs Robert he is now owner of a mining claim in Colorado, and advising him to see Henry Beamish, a lawyer. Beamish tells Robert his claim, a silver mine, is at Ohadi, thirty-eight miles from Denver. He also warns him against a certain man, "Squint" Rodaine, his father's enemy. On the road to Ohadi from Denver Fairchild assists a girl, apparently in a frenzy of haste, to change a tire on her auto. When she has left, the sheriff and a posse appear, in pursuit of a bandit. Fairchild bewildered, misleads them as to the direction the girl had taken. At Ohadi Fairchild is warmly greeted by "Mother" Howard, boarding-house keeper, for his father's sake. From Mother Howard, Fairchild learns something of the mystery connected with the disappearance of "Sissie" Larsen, his father's co-worker in the mine. He meets the girl he had assisted, but she denies her identity. She is Anita Richmond, Judge Richmond's daughter. Visiting his claim, Fairchild is shadowed by a man he recognizes from descriptions as "Squint" Rodaine. Back in Ohadi, his father's old friend, Harry Harkins, a Cornishman, summoned from England by Beamish to help Fairchild, hails him with joy. The pair find the mine flooded and have not sufficient funds to have it pumped dry. Later in the day "Squint" Rodaine announces that he practically saw Harkins fall into the flooded mine, and evidently is drowned. Harkins being a general favorite, the entire population turns out to clear the flooded mine. When the work is practically done, Harry appears, apparently surprised at the turmoil. It had been a shrewd trick on his part to get the mine pumped out without cost to himself or Fairchild, and the men take it as a good joke. Fairchild learns that Judge Richmond is dying, and that he and Anita are in the power of the Rodaines. They begin, as partners, to work the mine. In their hearts both fear Larsen was killed by Thornton Fairchild and his body buried by a cave-in which destroyed the mine. At the "Old Times Ball" Fairchild dances with Anita, to the discomfiture of Maurice Rodaine, son of "Squint," supposed to be engaged to the girl. A bandit holds up the dance and shoots a merrymaker. Maurice Rodaine claims he recognized the bandit as Harkins. The latter is arrested. Fairchild interferes to save Anita from the bullying of the two Rodaines, and is mystified at Anita's apparent ingratitude. Fairchild puts up the claim as bond, and secures Harry's release from jail. They are offered $50,000 for the claim, by an unknown party, but agree to disregard it. Clearing the mine, they come to where they fear to find Larsen's remains. A skeleton, in a miner's costume, which Harkins identifies as Larsen, is there, and there seems little doubt that Thornton Fairchild was a murderer. Fairchild informs the coroner of the discovery of the skeleton. At the inquest "Crazy Laura," castoff wife of "Squint" Rodaine, and an acknowledged imbecile, gives damaging testimony against Thornton Fairchild.

CHAPTER XII—Continued.

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"I think otherwise. The jury is entitled to all the evidence that has any bearing on the case."

"But this woman is crazy!"

"Has she ever been adjudged so, or committed to any asylum for the insane?"

"No—but nevertheless, there are a hundred persons in this courtroom who will testify to the fact that she is mentally unbalanced and not a fit person to fasten a crime upon any man's head by her testimony. And referring even to yourself, Coroner, have you within the last twenty-five years, in fact, since a short time after the birth of her son, called her anything else but Crazy Laura? Has anyone else in this town called her any other name? Man, I appeal to your—"

"What you say may be true. It may not. I don't know. I only am sure of one thing—that a person is sane in the eyes of the law until adjudged otherwise. Therefore, her evidence at this time is perfectly legal and proper."

"It won't be as soon as I can bring an action before a lunacy court and cause her examination by a board of alienists."

"That's something for the future. In that case things might be different. But I can only follow the law, with the members of the jury instructed, of course, to accept the evidence for what they deem it is worth. You will proceed, Mrs. Rodaine. What did you see that caused you to come to this conclusion?"

"Can't you even stick to the rules and ethics of testimony?" It was the final plea of the defeated Farrell. The coroner eyed him slowly.

"Mr. Farrell," came his answer, "I must confess to a deviation from regular court procedure in this inquiry. It is customary in an inquest of this character; certain departures from the usual rules must be made that the truth and the whole truth be learned. Proceed, Mrs. Rodaine, what was it you saw?"

Transfixed, horrified, Fairchild watched the mumbling, munching mouth, the staring eyes and straying white hair, the bony, crooked hands as they weaved before her. From those toothless jaws a story was about to come, true or untrue, a story that would stain the name of his father with murder. And that story now was at its beginning.

"I saw them together that afternoon early," the old woman was saying. "I came up the road just behind them, and they were fussing. Both of 'em acted like they were mad at each other, but Fairchild seemed to be the maddest.

"I didn't pay much attention to them because I just thought they were fighting about some little thing and that it wouldn't amount to much. I went on up the gulch—I was gathering flowers. After awhile the earth shook and I heard a big explosion, from away down underneath me—like thunder when it's far away. Then, pretty soon, I saw Fairchild come rushing out of the mine, and his hands were all bloody. He ran to the creek and washed them, looking around to see if anybody was watching him—but he didn't notice me. Then, when he'd washed the blood from his hands, he got up on the road and went down into town. Later on, I thought I saw all three of 'em leave town, Fairchild, Sissie and a fellow named Harkins. So I never paid any more attention to it until today. That's all I know."

She stepped down then and went back to her seat with Squint Rodaine and the son, fidgeting there again, craning her neck as before, while Fairchild, son of a man just accused of murder, watched her with eyes fascinated from horror. The coroner looked at a slip of paper in his hand.

"William Barton," he called. A miner came forward, to go through the usual formalities, and then he asked the question:

"Did you see Thornton Fairchild on the night he left Ohadi?"

"Yes, a lot of us saw him. He drove out of town with Harry Harkins, and a fellow who we all thought was Sissie Larsen."

"That's all. Gentlemen of the jury," he turned his back on the crowded room and faced the small, worried appearing group on the row of kitchen chairs, "you have heard the evidence. You will find a room at the right in which to conduct your deliberations."

Shuffling forms faded through the door at the right. Then followed long moments of waiting, in which Robert Fairchild's eyes went to the floor, in which he strove to avoid the gaze of every one in the crowded courtroom. He knew what they were thinking, that his father had been a murderer, and that he—well, that he was blood of his father's blood. He could hear the buzzing of tongues, the shifting of the courtroom on the unstable chairs, and he knew fingers were pointing at him. For once in his life he had not the strength to face his fellow men. A quarter of an hour—a knock on the door—then the six men clattered forth again, to hand a piece of paper to the coroner. And he, adjusting his glasses, turned to the courtroom and read:

"We, the jury, find that the deceased came to his death from injuries

"We, the Jury, Find That the Deceased Came to His Death From Injuries Sustained at the Hands of Thornton Fairchild."

sustained at the hands of Thornton Fairchild, in or about the month of June, 1892."

That was all, but it was enough. The stain had been placed; the thing which the white-haired man who had sat by a window back in Indianapolis had feared all his life had come after death.

It seemed hours before the courtroom cleared. Then, the attorney at one side, Harry at the other, he started out of the courtroom.

The crowd still was on the street, milling, circling, dividing itself into little groups to discuss the verdict. Through them shot scrambling forms of newsboys. Dazedly, simply for the sake of something to take his mind from the throngs and the gossip about him, Fairchild bought a paper and stepped to the light to glance over the first page. There, emblazoned under the "Extra" heading, was the story of the finding of the skeleton in the Blue Poppy mine, while beside it was something which caused Robert Fairchild to almost forget, for the moment, the horrors of the ordeal which he was undergoing. It was a paragraph leading the "personal" column of the small, amateurish sheet, announcing the engagement of Miss Anita Natalie Richmond to Mr. Maurice Rodaine, the wedding to come "probably in the late fall!"

By Courtney Ryley Cooper

CHAPTER XIII.

Fairchild did not show the item to Harry. There was little that it could accomplish, and besides, he felt that his comrade had enough to think about. The unexpected turn of the coroner's inquest had added to the heavy weight of Harry's troubles; it meant the probability in the future of a grand jury investigation and the possible indictment as accessory after the fact in the murder of "Sissie" Larsen. Not that Fairchild had been influenced in the slightest by the testimony of Crazy Laura; the presence of Squint Rodaine and his son had shown too plainly that they were connected in some way with it, that, in fact, they were responsible. An opportunity had arisen for them, and they had seized upon it. More, there came the shrewd opinion of old Mother Howard, once Fairchild and Harry had reached the boarding house and gathered in the parlor for their consultation:

"Ain't it what I said right in the beginning?" Mother Howard asked. "She'll kill for that man, if necessary. It wasn't as hard as you think—all Squint Rodaine had to do was to act nice to her and promise her a few things that he'll squirm out of later on, and she went on the stand and lied her head off."

"But for a crazy woman—"

"Laura's crazy—and she ain't crazy. I've seen that woman as sensible and as shrewd as any sane woman who ever drew breath. Then again, I've seen her when I wouldn't get within fifty miles of her. Goodness only knows what would happen to a person who fell into her clutches when she's got one of those immortality streaks on."

"One of those what?" Harry looked up in surprise.

"Immortality. That's why you'll find her sneaking around graveyards at night, gathering herbs and taking them to that old house on the Georgeville road, where she lives, and brewing them into some sort of concoction that she sprinkles on the graves. She believes that it's a sure system of bringing immortality to a person. Poison—that's about what it is."

Harry shrugged his shoulders.

"Poison's what she is!" he exclaimed. "Ain't it enough that I'm accused of every crime in the calendar without 'er getting me mixed up in a murder? And—" this time he looked at Fairchild with dolorous eyes—"'ow 're we going to furnish bond this time, if the grand jury indicts me?"

"I'm afraid there won't be any."

Mother Howard set her lips for a minute, then straightened proudly.

"Well, I guess there will! It's bondable—and I guess I've got a few things that are worth something—and a few friends that I can go to. I don't see why I should be left out of everything, just because I'm a woman!"

"Lor' love you!" Harry grinned, his eyes showing plainly that the world was again good for him and that his troubles, as far as a few slight charges of penitentiary offenses were concerned, amounted to very little in his estimation. Harry had a habit of living just for the day. And the support of Mother Howard had wiped out all future difficulties for him. The fact that convictions might await him and that the heavy doors at Canon City might yawn for him made little difference right now. Behind the great bulwark of his mustache, his big lips spread in a happy announcement of joy, and the world was good.

Silently, Robert Fairchild rose and left the parlor for his own room. Some way he could not force himself to shed his difficulties in the same light, airy way as Harry. Looking back he could see now that his dreams had led only to catastrophes. From the very beginning, there had been only trouble, only fighting, fighting, fighting against insurmountable odds, which seemed to throw him ever deeper into the mire of defeat, with every onslaught. The Rodaines had played with stacked cards, and so far every hand had been theirs. Fairchild suddenly realized that he was all but whipped, that the psychological advantage was all on the side of Squint Rodaine, his son, and the crazy woman who did their bidding. More, another hope had gone glimmering; even had the announcement not come forth that Anita Richmond had given her promise to marry Maurice Rodaine, the action of a coroner's jury that night had removed her from hope forever. A son of a man who has been called a slayer has little right to love a woman, even if that woman has a bit of mystery about her. All things can be explained—but murder!

It was growing late, but Fairchild did not seek bed. Instead he sat by the window, staring out at the shadows of the mountains, out at the free, pure night, and yet at nothing. After a long time, the door opened, and a big form entered—Harry—to stand silent a moment, then to come forward and lay a hand on the other man's shoulder.

"Don't let it get you, Boy," he said softly—for him. "It's going to come out all right. Everything comes out all right—if you ain't wrong yourself."

"I know, Harry. But it's an awful tangle right now."

"Sure it is. But it ain't as if a sane person 'ad said it against you. There'll never be anything more to that; Farrell 'ave 'er adjudged insane if it ever comes to anything like that. She'll never give no more testimony. I've been talking with 'im—'e stopped in just after you came upstairs. It's only a crazy woman."

"But they took her word for it, Harry. They believed her. And they gave the verdict—against my father!"

"I know. I was there, right beside you. I 'eard it. But it'll come out right, some way."

There was a moment of silence, then a gripping fear at the heart of Fairchild.

"Just how crazy is she, Harry?"

"'Er? Plumb daft! Of course, as Mother 'Oward says, there's times when she's straight—but they don't last long. And, if she'd given 'er testimony in writing, Mother 'Oward says it all might 'ave been different, and we'd not 'ave 'ad anything to worry about."

"In writing?"

"Yes, she's 'arfway sane then. It seems 'er mind's disconnected, some wye. I don't know 'ow—Mother 'Oward's got the 'ole lingo, and everybody in town knows about it. Whenever anybody wants to get anything real straight from Crazy Laura, they make 'er write it. That part of 'er brain seems all right. She remembers everything she does then and 'ow crazy it is, and tells you all about it. Notice 'ow flustered up she got when the coroner asked 'er about that book?"

"I wonder what it would really tell?"

Harry chuckled.

"Nobody knows. Nobody's ever seen it. Not even Squint Rodaine. I guess it's a part of 'er right brain that tells 'er to keep it a secret! I'm going to bed now. So 're you. And you're going to sleep. Good night."

He went out of the room then, and Fairchild, obedient to the big Cornishman's command, sought rest. But it was a hard struggle. Morning came, and he joined Harry at breakfast, facing the curious glances of the other boarders, staving off their inquiries and their illy couched consolations. For, in spite of the fact that it was not voiced in so many words, the conviction was present that Crazy Laura had told at least a semblance of the truth, and that the dovetailing incidents of the past fitted into a well-connected story for which there must be some foundation. There were those who were plainly curious; there were others who professed not to believe the testimony and who talked loudly of action against the coroner for having introduced the evidence of a woman known by every one to be lacking in balanced mentality. There were others who, by their remarks, showed that they were concealing the real truth of their thoughts and only using a cloak of interest to guide them to other food for the carrion proclivities of their minds.

An hour later Harry, wandering by the younger man's side, strove for words and at last uttered them.

"I know it's disagreeable," came finally. "But it's necessary. You 'aven't quit?"

"Quit what?"

"The mine. You're going to keep on, ain't you?"

Fairchild gritted his teeth and was silent. The answer needed strength. Finally it came.

"Harry, are you with me?"

"I ain't stopped yet!"

"Then that's the answer. As long as there's a bit of fight left in us, we'll keep at that mine."

Harry hitched at his trousers.

"They've got that blooming skeleton out by this time. I'm willing to start—any time you say."

The breath went over Fairchild's teeth in a long, slow intake. He clenched his hands and held them trembling before him for a lengthy moment. Then he turned to his partner.

"Give me an hour," he begged. "I'll go then—but it takes a little grit to—"

"Who's Fairchild here?" A messenger boy was making his way along the curb with a telegram. Robert stretched forth a hand in surprise.

"I am. Why?"

The answer came as the boy shoved forth the yellow envelope. Fairchild, wondering, read:

"Please come to Denver at once. Have most important information for you.

"R. V. BARNHAM,
"H. & R. Building."

A moment of staring, then Fairchild passed the telegram over to Harry for his opinion. There was none. Together they went across the street and to the office of Farrell, their attorney. He studied the telegram long. Then:

"I can't see what on earth it means, unless there is some information about this skeleton or the inquest. If I were you, I'd go."

"But supposing it's some sort of trap?"

"No matter what it is, go and let the other fellow do all the talking. Listen to what he has to say and tell him nothing. I'd go down on the noon train—that'll get you there about two. You can be back by 10:30 tomorrow."

"No 'e can't," it was Harry's interruption as he grasped a pencil and paper. "I've got a list of things a mile long for 'im to get. We're going after this mine 'ammer and tongs now!"

When noon came, Robert Fairchild, with his mysterious telegram, boarded the train for Denver, while in his pocket was a list demanding the outlay of nearly a thousand dollars: supplies of fuses, of dynamite, of drills, of a forge, of single and double jack sledges, of fulminate caps—a little of everything that would be needed in the months to come, if he and 'Arry were to work the mine. It was only a beginning, a small quantity of each article needed, part of which could be picked up in the junk yards at a rea-

"Who's Fairchild Here?"

sonable figure, other things that would eat quickly into the estimate placed upon the total. And with a capital already dwindling, it meant an expenditure which hurt, but which was necessary, nevertheless.

Slow, puffing and wheezing, the train made its way along Clear Creek canon, crawled across the newly built trestle which had been erected to take the place of that which had gone out with the spring flood of the milky creek, then jangled into Denver. Fairchild hurried uptown, found the old building to which he had been directed by the telegram, and made the upward trip in the ancient elevator, at last to knock upon a door. A half-whining voice answered him, and he went within.

A greasy man was there, greasy in his fat, uninviting features, in his seemingly well-oiled hands, as they circled in constant kneading, in his long, straggling hair, in his old, spotted Prince Albert—and in his manners.

"Mr. Barnham?"

"That's what I'm called." He wheezed with the self-implied humor of his remark and motioned toward a chair. "May I ask what you've come to see me about?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. You sent for me." Fairchild produced the telegram, and the greasy person who had taken a position on the other side of a worn, walnut table became immediately obsequious.

"Of course! Of course! Mr. Fairchild! Why didn't you say so when you came in? Of course—I've been looking for you all day. May I offer you a cigar?"

He dragged a box of domestic perfectos from a drawer of the table and struck a match to light one for Fairchild. Then with a bustling air of urgent business he hurried to both doors and locked them.

"So that we may not be disturbed," he confided in that high, whining voice. "I am hoping that this is very important."

"I also." Fairchild puffed dubiously upon the more dubious cigar. The greasy individual returned to his table, dragged the chair nearer it, then, seating himself, leaned toward Fairchild.

"If I'm not mistaken, you're the owner of the Blue Poppy mine."

"I'm supposed to be."

"Of course—of course. Could you possibly do me the favor of telling me how you're getting along?"

Fairchild's eyes narrowed.

"I thought you had information—for me!"

"Very good." Mr. Barnham raised a fat hand and wheezed in an effort at intense enjoyment of the reply. "So I have. I merely asked that to be asking. Now, to be serious, haven't you some enemies, Mr. Fairchild?"

"Have I?"

"I was merely asking."

"And I judged from your question that you seemed to know."

"So I do. And one friend." Barnham pursed his heavy lips and nodded in an authoritative manner. "One very, very good friend."

"That's a lie—that's a lie and you know it."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

"Little Corporal."

"Little Corporal" was the title familiarly bestowed upon Napoleon Bonaparte by his admiring soldiers after the Battle of Lodi (1796), in allusion to his small stature, youthful appearance and surpassing bravery.

Amenities.

Rastus and Mose were having a heated argument. In reply to some remark of Rastus, Mose said:

"Guess I know, niggah! Don't you think I'se got any brains."

"Huh!" Rastus replied. "Niggah, if brains were dynamite, you couldn't blow off your hat!"—Labor Clarion.

Substitute for Radium.

A young man who had heard that radium was going to cure the world of all its ills entered a chemist's shop and asked:

"How much is radium an ounce?"

The chemist smiled and named a figure which made the young man blink. "Really?" observed the customer. "Then give me an ounce of cough lozenges."

Wouldn't Be Wasted.

During a snowstorm early in spring Jack with his shaggy-haired dog, Turk, came upon our porch to shovel off the snow.

Hearing the noise I opened the door to find Turk sitting up, begging for something, so I asked Jack what he wanted.

"He wants bread and butter."

I said, "Do you think he would eat it if I got it for him?"

"Well, if he don't I will," was the answer.—Exchange.

Another Darned Cynic.

"Why is Johnson looking so down in the mouth?"

"The poor fellow was disappointed in love."

"Of course it never does come up to one's expectations."

Soon Tired.

"First a man proceeds to lay off a garden." "And then?" "He proceeds to lay off."